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THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

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"WHAT is the greatest thing in all the world?" asks the Master Builder, and Hilda replies, "Castles in the air, of course." Man forever builds his world of dreams, some ideal Republic, Utopia, New Atlantis, or some mythical yet perfect state upon Mars. Thither he transports himself and other kindred spirits, for in that fanciful commonwealth it will at last be less difficult to follow truth, find justice, experience beauty, and love to the utmost. Back through mystics and metaphysicians one may go to the beginning of time, yet always will one find the dream of some kingdom of heaven, some beloved community, where perfection has not only become desirable but also possible.

Benjamin Kidd's *The Science of Power* has been followed by a strange horde of books boasting the omnipotence of the new psychology. The junior clerk, dreaming of a chief executive's mahogany desk, has only to hypnotize himself with a magic formula, and the thing is done. There is nothing in common between *The Science of Power* and such books as *You Can, but Will You?* except that both make dreams and desires the antidote to the rather deadening prospect of the infinitely slow and tedious reform of the evolutionist. Many a man having read Kidd has turned a new leaf in his diary, and written Anno Lux 1. This thing is true: the kingdom comes along the highway of expectancy.

Take an outstanding illustration. We are told that there was an expectation in Israel. For ages the wistful dream of all the tribes had been that war and strife should give way to peace and compassionate understanding. Prophets declared that the Crowned One, who would be lord of the new day, would be a man of marked insight, a see-er, who would establish new standards of world values. Priests assured the people that he would institute the sacrament of a vastly more vital experience of God. Psalmists sang of the advent of one who would be sensitive to all beauty, divinely aware of true loveliness in nature and in the heart of man. The multitude of common men desired that in him they would find an advocate, who would see that justice was done to all, justice tempered with mercy and loving kindness.

Generations came and went, the torch of hope being flung from the expiring hands of the last to the newest. Finally the time was fulfilled, the world was ripe, and he came! He entered into his kingdom along the highway of expectancy, of wistful desire, of great and anguished longing. All that was best in the ideas of kingship accumulating through the ages was crowned in him. All that was divinest in the notions of chief prophets and high priests was fulfilled in him. Justice too lofty for purchase, truth too high for compromise, met at last in him. The humble citizen looked up and found in him a man, all that a man could be when he desired and dared the best. A thrill ran through the old world. The gods were dead, Marduk, Osiri Zeus and the rest. Beauty had withered. Justice and love were lifeless. Then the miracle happened. All that was best of what had survived the winnowing of time was preserved in the

new Master Builder. As for the rest they yielded up their spark of life and expired. A new era had begun. Some declared that the time was so great with change that the heavens opened, that the stars moved in new orbits, that the graves were opened and death cheated, that there was music in the air. Others, sensing the fact that the dream of the ages was at last consummated, ran and shouted joyfully: "It is he! It is he!"

The chief thing to be remembered is, that the king came riding into his own upon the wings of expectancy. All that was willed and hoped and dreamed of good, to paraphrase Robert Browning, all that was divinely longed for through the generations, did at last exist.

What was possible then is equally possible now. Let a community earnestly and continuously desire and prepare for a fresh revelation of the best, and as surely as the stars obey the urge of the central sun, so shall the dream come true, "not its semblance but itself." In this all men have an important part. The new heavens and the new earth depend not so much upon parties and philosophies, upon armies arguments, as upon the earnest desire of the “chosen people." This is where Freemasonry came in.

While Masonry is, in a sense, open to the world, not all men may join its brotherhood. There are no barriers of creed, color or caste, but only those should join who are able to grasp its hidden significance. For this reason our lodges must ever remain close tyled. The process of selection must be still more perfect. The temple we would raise is based on justice, justice operative in the daily lives of men. Our walls are built of that material out of which Parsifal, Sir Galahad, Prince Muishkin and the Carpenter were conceived, plain and substantial goodness. Broad avenues lead up to it from North, East, South and West, significant of hospitality and expectancy to universal truth. Beauty is the "dome of many colored glass” which roofs it in. And the banner over it is brotherhood.

Either we mean this, or our ceremonies are a mockery, and our obligations a farce. But we do mean it, and therefore counsel our initiates that they make a daily advancement in these truths. Daily, yet even eternity will be required to exhaust all their implications. Less time at our regular convocations should be occupied with initiatory work and business routine, and more opportunity allowed for working around the trestle-board of our ancient and divine science. Our new brethren must be received with that impressiveness for which our ceremonies are universally known. Their instruction may begin in degree work, and be continued by coaches, but it should be enhanced by the earnest questing of the whole lodge. The beginning and the end of many a lodge is degree work and the conviviality of the midnight cold lunch. What began as a community force dare not end there! What originated as a science and an art, discovering truth and erecting dreams in marble, must not deteriorate into any such insipid thing. Lodge attendance will increase in proportion as the designs of the master gain in interest and imperativeness.

The chief thing about Masonry is that it contains not so much a system of morality or ethical philosophy, as that it offers a challenge by many means to the attainment of its age-old dream the dream of a masterbuilder in a company of brothers, in other words a beloved community. Blind Homer saw more clearly than anyone else an ideal Greek. So he hung Achilles in the heavens above his people, not an argument, not a syllogism, not a creed, but a living symbol. That dream became effective in all the Greek states bordering the Aegean. Now Masonry's glory is just that. It offers no organized religious, social, ethical or other system, but it does present something much more vital and important.

It consists of a beloved community held together for generations, not by an elaborate symbolism and a lofty ritual, by secret signs and words, but by an eager expectancy.

This community of desire creates an atmosphere in which the high hopes of men can reasonably be achieved. Water lilies do not flourish in the desert. Neither do truth, beauty and love blossom in uncongenial conditions. It is for this purpose we are pledged. We obligate ourselves to think truth, and thereby create an atmosphere friendly to the great teacher, when at last he shall have appeared. We bind ourselves to think beauty, and thus prepare the highway for the radiant feet of the poet and artist when finally they come with fresh surprises of loveliness. We solemnly swear to think love, and thereby cast up bridges to span the hearts of men, so that when the king comes he may find the world on the tip-toe of expectancy to receive the newest law of brotherhood.

And who shall say that the need of Masonry has been exhausted? It does not pretend to compete with select clubs and insurance societies. It offers no rivalry to the church. Although many of its ideas and symbols may be familiar to the religious denominations, it has wisely reserved for religion the most sacred characters, symbols and names known to men. On a lower plane however, and only a little lower, it carries on its supplementary enterprise. Where as religion requires confessions of faith, and subscription to clearly defined creeds, Masonry allows no such barriers. It says to all men: "Your complexion is not mine. Your language is strange. Your garments are different. But you desire truth, beauty and love; then hand to hand I greet you as a brother."

This, then, is the Beloved Community. It is the trystingplace of the best of the nations. It is a communion of likeminded people who perpetuate the dream of the ages for the best of all possible men, in the best of all possible worlds. It believes that this dream is not a mockery planted in the hearts of succeeding generations of men, but, on the contrary, it is a promise and pledge that these things shall be. It understands that society progresses only along those highways prepared in the minds of hopeful men. It is convinced that its duty is not merely to announce the coming advent, but to build a throne in the east for the worshipful master when at last he appears. He comes, the supreme artist! Can his beauty blossom in this atmosphere? He comes, the master teacher! Will his new and startling truths have half a chance in this soil? Shall he be welcomed home, or shall he be greeted with the old cries of "Heretic!" "Traitor!" and the other trite phrases of intolerance? He comes, the guileless one! Will the newest word from the Father on the value and destiny of man be heard gladly?

That is the final test. Men are still intolerant, obstinate and jealous. They do unlovely things. They fail to love to the limit. But if Masons, in the smallest lodge as well as in the most beautiful temple, would but establish the Beloved Community, this league of friendly minds, our portals would become increasingly the gateway of the elect. When the son of the highest arrives he will most surely come to his own. Some of the most eminent master builders the world has known, in art, literature, science, philosophy and religion, have possessed the passwords of our lodges. Others are on their way, each with a fragment of that truth which was lost and which we desire. Eager expectancy in the North, reverent inquiry in the East, loving solicitude in the South, beautiful tolerance in the West, desire at the Gates then a challenge ! Who knocks? A Presence crowned with beauty, robed with light! We have held fast the dream and lo! "It is he! It is he!"